

THE NIGHT TRAIN TO ANYWHERE · BOOK 7

The Borrowed Moon

A story where YOU choose the way



STORYBRANCH

Books that branch. Minds that grow.

Meet Your Fellow Travelers

Every journey on the Night Train is better with friends. Here's who is riding with you tonight — and how each one sounds when you read them aloud:

Rowan — The hero of every journey — curious, brave, and wearing the orange coat. Rowan's choices belong to YOU.

The Conductor — Keeper of the timetable and the wisdom. Read him slow as syrup, in your deepest, sleepest rumble.

Tick the Ticket Mouse — Punches the tickets, panics the loudest. Read him fast-fast-FAST, squeaky and tremendously official — and tonight, very proud of his lantern idea.

Nimbus — The lonely little cloud who borrowed the moon. Read him soft and drifting, halfway between a whisper and a snuffle, every sentence trailing off...

The Moon — Patient and warm — a voice like a hum you can feel in your chest. Round vowels, no hurry, never angry. She just misses the sky.





The Night Train came on a night so dark that Rowan didn't see it arrive at all—only heard it. The hisssss. The slow, sleepy sigh of the brakes. And the Conductor's voice, sounding, for once in his life, a little bit unsure.

Rowan opened the window. Stars! Thousands and thousands of them. And right in the middle of the sky, a round dark hole where the moon ought to be.

“Alllll aboard,” said the Conductor. “No hurry... no hurry at all... only—the moon's gone missing. Not set. Not behind a cloud. GONE. And a train can't find its rails without moonlight, so I'm afraid tonight's journey stops at the top of Skyhill... unless somebody can find where the moon went.”

Rowan looked at the hole in the sky. The hole in the sky looked back. Boots on, coat on, out the door!

The train is waiting. Turn the page.



Skyhill Station sat on the very tip-top of a mountain, up above the clouds. Below the platform, the clouds spread out like a soft grey sea, and beside it stood the Moon Dock—a great silver cradle where the moon rested every evening before she rose.

It was empty. “She was here at sunset,” said the Conductor, checking his watch as if the moon were merely running late. “I said good evening. She said good evening. I went to fetch the tea, and—” He spread his big hands at the empty cradle. “Gone!”

Tick hung over the edge of the platform, squinting so hard his whiskers crossed. “THERE,” he squeaked. Far, far off, one small cloud was glowing—faintly, warmly, gold from the inside, like a lamp under a blanket.

Somewhere down below the clouds, a whole dark valley was waiting for the moon. So was the train. So was a very small mouse, tapping his foot.

★ **No moon, one glowing cloud. Where does Rowan go?**

- **Walk out across the clouds to the glowing one:** *If you choose the cloud, that glow is the only light in the sky and it's the color of the moon — but whatever is hiding her may not want to give her up. → turn to page 5*
- **Go down to the dark valley and ask what people saw:** *If you choose the valley, a whole town of witnesses is down there — but a town of witnesses means a town of stories, and not all of them will be true. → turn to page 19*
- **Stay at the Moon Dock and get everyone through the night:** *If you choose the dock, Tick has an idea for making light without the moon — though light that isn't the moon doesn't fool the things that need her. → turn to page 33*



The cloud-sea was soft as a meadow and held Rowan's boots like fresh snow—squish, squish, squish. Tick rode in the hood. The glowing cloud got bigger, and rounder, and then it turned around—and it had a FACE.

A small, round, puffy cloud with big worried eyes and rosy cheeks, and light pouring out of its edges like a nightlight through a blanket.

“Oh,” it said. “Oh no. You've come for her.” It sniffled. “I'm Nimbus. I only BORROWED her! She was resting on her dock, and I was passing, and she was so warm, and nobody ever... stays. So I wrapped myself round her. Just for a bit.” Inside the cloud, something hummed—low, and silver, and unmistakably the moon.

“I'll give her back,” said Nimbus quickly. “Tomorrow! Could it be tomorrow? One more night. Just one. She doesn't mind. Do you?”

And from inside the cloud, warm and patient, the Moon said: “I miss the sky, dear. But I'm not angry.”

★ One more night — or ask why?

- **Ask Nimbus why he took her:** *If you choose to ask, a cloud that borrowed the moon has a reason, and reasons can be worked with — but listening takes time, and the valley below is already in the dark. → turn to page 9*
- **Let Nimbus keep her one more night:** *If you choose one more night, it's such a small thing, and the cloud is so sad, and the Moon herself says she isn't angry — though 'one more night' is one more night for everyone, not just for Nimbus. → turn to page 7*



— One More Night —

“One more night,” said Rowan. Nimbus glowed with relief and folded himself tighter round the Moon, and her light dimmed down to a hum.

And the dark came down like a lid. CLUNK.

Up on the mountain, the Night Train's headlamp shone out into nothing at all—the rails had simply vanished. Down below the clouds, the valley went black. The night ferry sat stuck at its pier with its passengers blinking over the rail. The owls stayed home. The moon-flowers stayed shut tight. A hundred small windows waited for a light that didn't come.

Tick, from the hood, said very quietly, “It's not one more night for HIM, is it? It's one more night for all of THEM.”

Rowan looked at the soft, happy, glowing cloud, and then at the dark, dark valley, and felt the two things pull in different directions—because the wrong choice had felt so kind!

“Nimbus,” Rowan said gently. “I said yes because you were sad. But look down. I have to ask you why—and then we have to do this properly.”

↻ **Go back to page 6 and choose again.**



Rowan sat down cross-legged on the cloud-top, soft as a pillow. “Why did you take her?”

Nimbus was quiet for a long while. Then he told it.

He had always been a small cloud. When the great cloud-flocks sailed across the sky at sunset—big and cheerful and shoulder to shoulder—he had tried and tried to keep up, and couldn't! Every evening they went over the edge of the world without him. Every evening he drifted, all alone, in the dark, above a valley full of lights that belonged to somebody else.

“And then she came by,” he said, “resting on her dock. And she was warm, and she hummed, and she didn't drift away. So I—” He couldn't finish. Inside him, the Moon hummed softly, the way you'd pat someone on the back.

It was a true story. Rowan could hear that. Every bit of the wanting in it was real. And the moon was still in the wrong place.

Turn the page.



Rowan thought about it the long way—the way the Conductor would, with a slow nod and a slower hum.

The wanting was real. The loneliness was real. None of that made keeping her RIGHT—because down below, a whole valley was sitting in the dark, and they hadn't done anything to Nimbus, and nobody had asked them.

But doing what's right, Rowan realized, didn't mean only doing what was right for the valley. It meant Nimbus, too! You could give the moon back AND not leave a small cloud alone in the dark. That was harder than either one. It was also the only answer that was actually fair.

“Nimbus,” Rowan said. “She has to go back. Tonight. That part isn't a maybe.” The cloud drooped like a wet sock. “And—you don't have to be alone. That part isn't a maybe either! I've got two ideas, and I need you to pick one with me.”

The Moon opened her eyes.

Two ideas. Turn the page.



END OF YOUR FREE SAMPLE

Can the moon come home?

You've reached the end of the free pages, and the biggest choice of the night is waiting on the very next page.

Chose "Go down to the dark valley and ask what people saw" or "Stay at the Moon Dock and get everyone through the night" on page 4? Those paths are in the full book too: 9 choices, 3 friendly dead ends and 7 different endings, so it's a new adventure every time you read it.

Start the series — \$49/month

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Next in this file: The Grown-Up's Ticket, your parent guide to Book 7.

Books that branch. Minds that grow.

The moon is gone from the sky — and one lonely little cloud knows exactly where she is!

Tonight, every choice belongs to YOU. Walk out across the clouds and ask the cloud why? Sort out a whole valley's stories about where the moon went? Hoist a lantern and pretend? Keeping her would be wonderful. Giving her back is right. And a whole valley is waiting in the dark.

Storybranch books are parent-guided choose-your-own-adventure-style stories for kids 3–8, made to be read together. You read, they choose — and every fork in the story builds the core skills of smart thinkers for the next AI revolution.

- ★ Read together · ages 3–8
- ★ 9 choices · 7 endings · a new adventure every night
- ★ Book 7 of 30 in The Night Train to Anywhere series

THE SKILLS IN THIS BOOK

Every Storybranch adventure practices two of the seven skills of smart thinkers. This book builds Choose What's Right — even when the wrong thing feels lovely — and Spot What's Not True — a sighting, a song, and a feeling are not the same.



Storybranch
Books that branch. Minds that grow.



★ ADMIT ONE GROWN-UP ★

The Grown-Up's Ticket

Your guide to reading *The Borrowed Moon* together

Tonight the sky over the whole line is strangely dark: the Moon Dock on top of Skyhill is empty, and far out on the cloud-sea one small, lonely cloud is glowing gold from the inside. Nimbus "borrowed" the moon — and hasn't quite gotten around to giving her back. Who could blame him? Keeping something wonderful is so much easier than doing the right thing with it. Your child — as Rowan — is about to meet the series' gentlest, hardest question: what do we do when the wrong thing feels lovely?

And here's the fun part: **your job isn't to teach.** You're the Conductor — you set the pace, do the voices, and ask one good question at the forks. Your child drives. This guide gives you everything you need: the two skills hiding inside the story, two signature "parent moves," a few tricks for making every choice feel like an event, a tracker for the nights ahead, and an observation log for noticing how the thinking grows.

★ PRIMARY SKILL

Choose what's right

Noticing when the easy path and the right path split — and choosing with empathy and honesty even when the wrong one glitters. Tools can propose routes; owning the choice stays human, permanently.

✦ SECONDARY SKILL

Spot what's not true

Checking claims against evidence before acting on them — including the cozy little claims we make to ourselves. Wanting something to be true doesn't make it true.

9

CHOICES TO MAKE

7

DIFFERENT ENDINGS

3

FRIENDLY DEAD ENDS

∞

WAYS TO READ IT AGAIN

★ **The one golden rule: never pick for them.** Ask, then wait — even when the silence stretches, even when they're clearly about to pick the "wrong" one. The pause is where the thinking happens, and the wrong turns are where the learning happens. Everything in this book is safe to get wrong.



PRIMARY

Choose what's right

The habit: the final call is mine — and so is what it costs others.

Machines can propose ten routes in a second; not one of them can care where the routes land. Moral reasoning, empathy, and accountability stay human jobs — permanently — and this story doesn't hide the hard part: the wrong choice here is genuinely wonderful, which is exactly what makes the right one matter. Every dead end is a "just one more night" — comfortable, understandable, and quietly dimming someone else's sky — and each one loops back to choose again. At ages 3–8 this looks wonderfully simple: noticing who else is in the story, and how the choice lands on them.

PARENT MOVE №1

The Compass vs. Clock Test

At a moral fork, name both instruments out loud: **"Keeping the moon would be wonderful for Nimbus ... but what's happening to everyone down in that dark valley? What does our compass say?"** Comfort and speed never get to override the compass by default. And when your child chooses kindly at a cost, name it: **"that was hard, and you did it anyway."**

✓ TRY SAYING	✗ INSTEAD OF
"Who else does this choice touch?"	"Nobody will ever know." (the sky knows)
"How would we feel if it were our moon?"	"It's not our problem."
"What does your tummy say is right — even if it's harder?"	"It's just a story." (this is the practice field)

SECONDARY

Spot what's not true

The habit: audit the excuse, especially your own.

The trickiest untruths in this book aren't told by a villain — there isn't one. A bat is *sure* the moon fell in the lake; a wind is *sure* it felt her go by; a lantern is called a moon; and a small cloud whispers "nobody will know." Excuses and rumors always arrive dressed as facts. A child who learns to hold even a cozy claim up to the light — did they SEE it, or do they just really believe it? — is building the rarest kind of honesty: the inward-facing kind.

PARENT MOVE №2

The Unreliable Source Audit

When a claim floats by — even one everybody likes — **put it on trial for ten seconds: "Hmm. Who says? Did they see it, or feel it? And do we believe it because it's true ... or because it's cozy?"** Then let your child deliver the verdict. The most unreliable source in this book isn't the cloud.

Showtime: making every choice a moment

THE GROWN-UP'S TICKET

A choice page is a tiny stage play, and you're the stage manager. You don't need all six of these — pick two that fit your kid and make them *yours*. Rituals are the point: by Book 3, your child will be doing them to *you*.

1 The Conductor's Whistle

When a choice is coming, give a long, low, sleepy **"whooooo..."** — the signal that a Big Decision is pulling into the station. Slow everything down. Decisions get drama; page turns don't.

2 The Finger Hover

One finger hovers over each option while you think out loud together — but **no touching until the choice is made**. The hover makes the pause physical (and very hard to rush).

3 The Ticket Punch

Decision made? Your child "punches the ticket": two firm taps on the chosen option and a squeaky **"Tickets, please!"** No punch, no page turn — Tick the Ticket Mouse insists.

4 Freeze the Picture

On each full-page painting, stop before reading on: **"What do you see? What's about to happen?"** Predict, then read, then check. Wrong guesses are cheered — that's a scientist at work.

5 Ask the Cast

Stuck between options? **"What would the Conductor do? What would Nimbus do?"** (Nimbus's plan is always *"keep her ... just one more night. Nobody will know."* Even a 3-year-old can hear the wobble in it — and explaining WHY the wobbly plan is wrong is the whole skill.)

6 Swap the Chooser

On re-reads, flip the roles: you choose, your child holds **veto power** — but a veto must come with a reason. Or let a stuffed animal choose, and audit its judgment together. (Be a deliciously bad chooser. Getting overruled is the goal.)

THE VOICES — YOUR FIVE-MEMBER CAST

Rowan

Warm and wondering — but mostly, Rowan speaks with your child's voice. When Rowan decides, hand the line over: *"what do we do?"*

The Conductor

Slow as syrup, deep and sleepy, with looong pauses. The easiest voice in children's literature — and the one they'll beg for. *"No hurry... no hurry at all..."*

Tick the Ticket Mouse

Fast-fast-FAST, squeaky, tremendously official. Sit up straight when he speaks. He is very busy and everything is an emergency.

Nimbus

The lonely little cloud who borrowed the moon — soft and drifting, halfway between a whisper and a sniffle, every sentence trailing off like weather ... Read him sweet, sad, and very huggable.

The Moon

Patient and warm — a voice like a hum you can feel in your chest. Round vowels, no hurry, never angry. She isn't cross with Nimbus; she just misses the sky.

Performance note: you need exactly *one* voice you love — the Conductor is the beginner's choice — and the Train needs no voice at all: whistles, hums and rumbles are your child's job. Consistency beats talent. Nobody is grading you, and the reviews in that bedroom are already five stars.

Punch your ticket: the re-read tracker

THE GROWN-UP'S TICKET

One night is one path — but this station holds **seven endings and three secret dead ends**, and no single read finds them all. Keep this page by the bed. After each ride, check off where you landed and give the ending a name of your own invention. Completing the whole card usually takes a week or two of bedtimes ... which is rather the idea.

★ THE SEVEN ENDINGS

☐ Ending 1 _____	☐ Ending 2 _____
☐ Ending 3 _____	☐ Ending 4 _____
☐ Ending 5 _____	☐ Ending 6 _____
☐ Ending 7 _____	

Write the name YOU gave each ending on the line.

• THE THREE DEAD ENDS — A BADGE OF HONOR, NOT A RECORD OF FAILURE

☐ Wrong turn 1 _____	☐ Wrong turn 2 _____
☐ Wrong turn 3 _____	

What did each one teach you? Jot the lesson.

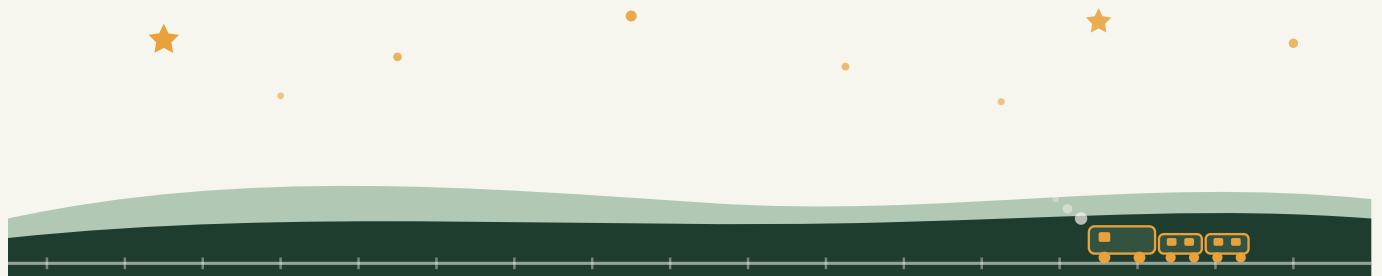
AFTER THE LAST PAGE — THREE LIGHTS-OUT QUESTIONS

1. "Which choice was the hardest tonight — and what made it hard?"
2. "What made the wrong choice feel so tempting tonight — and who was it wrong FOR?"
3. "Who was **SURE** about something tonight that turned out not to be true?"

Sixty seconds, lights low, no quiz energy. If you only have time for one, ask the second — it's the whole book in a single question.

Same station, different night.

Every reader who boards makes different choices — which means the book your child read tonight isn't quite the book they'll read tomorrow. When you've collected every ending, leave the card in the book: it's the story of how your child learned to think, one fork at a time. Next month, a new station.



The observation log: what you noticed tonight

THE GROWN-UP'S
TICKET

Page 4 tracks **where the story went**. This page tracks **how your child thought** along the way — the part that carries over to homework, playgrounds and every station still to come. After each read, take a quiet minute to score the six behaviors below. It isn't a test, and "not yet" is honest, useful information: over a few weeks, the *pattern* is what matters.

0 Not yet tonight 1 With a nudge from you 2 On their own *Write the date in the top box of each read.*

WHAT TO WATCH FOR	READ 1	READ 2	READ 3	READ 4	READ 5	READ 6
DATE						
Paused before choosing Waited, thought, or offered an idea before picking an option.						
Went back after a dead end Chose to return to the fork and try a different path.						
Named what went wrong Could say, in their own words, why a wrong turn was wrong.						
Accepted an outcome they didn't want Stayed with the story after a disappointing turn, without a meltdown or a demand to undo it.						
Kept track across pages Remembered something from earlier in the story and used it at a choice.						
Stayed with the story Attention held from the first page to the ending, without needing a break.						
Found choosing stressful tonight Tick if the forks felt like pressure rather than fun. If this gets ticked often, read one path straight through and choose only at the final fork — fewer decisions, same story.						

NOTES — ONE LINE PER NIGHT

READ 1

READ 2

READ 3

READ 4

READ 5

READ 6

Scores aren't grades, and no single night means much. What you're collecting is a picture of a growing mind at work — the same six behaviors, book after book, station after station. Keep the page with the book and compare it to next month's.

